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Bush Releases Intelligence Report to Rebut Gunner's Story of 1944 Mission

By Dan Morgan
 Washington Post Staff Writer

Vice President Bush's office yesterday released an intelligence report of the 1944 mission in which he was shot down, in an effort to refute published reports that the turret gunner of another plane questioned Bush's version of the incident.

The activity in the Bush campaign was sparked by comments by a former Navy gunner from the plane ahead of the one Bush was piloting when hit by enemy fire in a Sept. 2, 1944, bombing raid against a Japanese radar installation on the island of Chichi Jima, 600 miles southwest of Japan.

Bush bailed out over water and was rescued by a submarine, but his two crew members were lost.

The gunner, Chester Mierzejewski, a retired factory foreman from Cheshire, Conn., suggested that Bush might have been able to save the men by ditching the plane in the water. He also differed with Bush in saying he saw no fire in the plane, only a "puff of smoke."

Mierzejewski's recollections were first disclosed in Friday's editions of The New York Post, which acknowledged that his account differed not only with Bush's recollection, but with the memories of other American servicemen involved in the incident and the official intelligence report on Bush's mission.

Yesterday, Bush's office released that intelligence report. It stated:

"After releasing his bombs, Lt. (jg) Bush turned sharply to the east to clear the island, smoke and flames enveloping his engine and spreading aft as he did so, and his plane losing altitude . . . 9 miles bearing 045 [degrees] T from Minami Jima, Bush and one other person were seen to bail out from about 3,000 ft. Bush's chute opened and he landed safely in water . . . The chute of the other person (either Lt. (jg) White or [radioman] J. L. Delaney), who bailed out, did not open."

[Special correspondent Michael Rezendes reported from Falmouth, Mass., that Democratic presidential nominee Massachusetts Gov. Michael S. Dukakis yesterday commended Bush for "enormous courage and tremendous patriotism" as a World War II naval aviator,

and said it was "unfortunate" that Bush's version of the incident had been questioned.

"I don't think that kind of thing has any place in the campaign," Dukakis said at a brief meeting with reporters at the Cape Cod home of in-laws. "This is a man who flew 58 missions and did so with great valor and great courage."

Bush has repeatedly said that neither crew member responded to his calls to them, convincing him they were dead when he jumped.

The day after the incident, Bush wrote a letter to his parents in which he stated: "The cockpit was full of smoke and I was choking from it. I glanced at the wings and noticed that they were on fire. I still do not know where we got hit and never will."

Ensign M. G. Moore, Bush's wing man, told the Washingtonian magazine in an interview published in August 1985 that his gunner, who could see what was happening, called out to him that he had seen "chutes" from the hit plane, which would tend to confirm that Bush was not the only man who bailed out.

Mierzejewski, reached by phone at his home yesterday, said he did not see any noticeable fire, and

added it appeared to him that Bush was regaining control of the plane after it was hit and lost altitude. He said he told this to the intelligence officer who was preparing the report on the mission.

Mierzejewski said Bush later told him: "Ski, I'm sure those two were dead back there. I called them three times and never got an answer."

"I have to give him the benefit of the doubt," Mierzejewski said. "I can't prove otherwise."

Mierzejewski said Donald Rhodes of the vice president's staff had called to offer a copy of that report, which he has never seen.

Douglas Melvin, the squadron commander who approved the report on the mission, is hospitalized with Parkinson's disease and cannot be interviewed, and the intelligence officer who prepared it is dead, according to The New York Post.

Bush received the Distinguished Flying Cross for "heroism and extraordinary achievement" as a result of the Sept. 2, 1944, action. The citation noted that he continued his dive against the target even after his plane was hit, inflicting damage as a result.